[Village of Mġarr]

By the mid-Thirties Mġarr had 11.

175 become independent of Mosta as a Police area and had been
722 connected to the Telephone network[15]. Other amenities
648 to reach the village about this time included a number of
[365] levelled roads, although asphalting did not appear until
[491] after the 1939-45 War. During the War years most construction activity was halted. Some 700 refugees from the blitzed harbour areas were billeted in the village; thirty shelters were dug, and about 600 bombs fell in the vicinity of the village destroying two houses and killing three people (B/291). United States' forces camped near Mġarr prior to the Sicily invasion: an Italian aircraft crashed not far away. Mġarr heard about the war and experienced as much of it at first hand as most other rural parts of the Islands lying well away from the Dockyard, air bases and
[434] other strategic targets. Food rationing and Government
[241] control of production put the farmers of Mġarr in as strong a position as elsewhere but at the worst period of the siege even they were reduced to chewing carob beans[12].

36 By the advent of the present decade Mġarr had acquired the normal characteristics of community life of village Malta, with Church, school, police station, dispensary and
[178] doctor, telephones, and roads. The built-up area has since
[794] expanded rapidly. In this present decade, too, the village has gone on to 'catch-up' with older settlements to the extent of establishing the four branches of the Catholic
[795] Action movement (Appendix 4). A most modern and well-
[544] appointed 'oratory' has for five years been the focal point of Catholic teaching and social work in the Parish. Its
[546] theatre holds 700 and shows films on Sundays and special occasions. More recently a commercial cinema has opened in the village but, one understands, it cannot detract from the popularity of the oratory film show.

443 Within the past few years, shops have appeared in the
[366] village which is now independent in this respect for food and general items. Travelling vans, a prominent feature of the countryside, further swell the range of goods available on the spot and are joined in this door to door service by
[484] the weekly paraffin (petrolju) vehicle. For other items
[494] Mġarr housewives still make the journey to Mosta or
[178] Valletta on the buses which operate every few hours; a generation ago their mothers carried bread on their backs each week from Mosta, the parent village.

184 On account of its recent development, Mġarr lacks
794 certain features found in the larger and much older settlements. The Catholic Action is the only Lay Movement in the village - though it is notably active there, and of the Confraternities which are numerous in the older settlements Mġarr has only three (Appendix 4).

654 (a) to decide which crops, animals, feeding stuffs, machinery, methods of farm management, etc., are most likely to improve Maltese farming conditions, and

(b) to pass this information to a conservative and doubting farming public.

654 242 A central feature of official policy since 1956 has been the Agricultural Advisory Service (B/252), modelled on the parallel organization in the United Kingdom. In Malta this body has aimed to co-ordinate research and experiment with encouraging the farmer to adopt proven results. Within a short while of its inception the Service was concerned with detailed investigations into pig rearing, poultry feeding, dairying, potatoes, tomatoes, fertilizers and other agricultural topics in the Islands (B/252, pp.3-4). At the same time a great deal of importance was attached to demonstrations and lectures to farmers. In addition broadcasts were made over the Rediffusion system and these were supplemented by a certain amount of printed publicity.

654 242 544 232 The easiest part of the programme of lectures and demonstrations was to get farmers and others to attend the meetings. Those who stayed away did so either because they could not be available at the appointed time or, more usually, because they could not be persuaded that foreign experts could know anything applicable to farming in Malta which the local farmer did not know already. The attitudes of those who did attend was revealing. In many cases the novelty of the event was the attraction but there was also a large element of reasoned interest. Attendances varied from a few dozen farmers in some of the smaller villages to 200 in Xaghra and other large rural settlements, while, in January, 1958, no less than 700 people assembled in Rabat to be lectured by four of the specialists then working with the local Department of Agriculture, and to see a film on "Clean Milk". The reactions of this audience were typical of the response to the whole range of lectures and demonstrations and illustrate clearly the kind of problem which any would-be improver of agriculture can expect to have to face in Malta. There was, significantly, only one Maltese woman in the audience at Rabat of which some two or three hundred appeared to be non-farmers and concerned rather with free coffee in the interval than with the topics of the lectures. Of the rest, however, some farmers had made considerable journeys to attend while more than a few of these had never set foot in a meeting hall or attended anything in the nature of a lecture or lesson in their lives. For them it was a 'Sunday-best' outing. Even the bravest

6:Beeley K-5 (1957-1958) 1959 EZ6 Malta EZ6

654 242 544 232 of those present could not however be pursuaded to ask any questions of the 'experts' or to develop any discussion, although everything not in Maltese was translated copiously. They were over-awed by the proceedings but were not slow to seize on topics raised by the speakers for future discussion among groups of farmers. The average age of those present was lower than that of the full-time farming population on account of the presence of large numbers of disinterested village youths and young men. But the true farmers themselves paid attention to what they were told and were especially impressed by the film.

Some of the points raised were dismissed as "not suitable for Malta". Some suggested measures were "interesting but unremunerative", notably the efforts, demonstrated in the film, to achieve cleanliness in milking. The farmer could not readily comprehend how he was to profit financially if he were to add what to him were needless tasks to an already heavy time-table. Yet, on the other hand, he was sceptical when told that many of the jobs which he is accustomed to performing could be replaced by more efficient methods. Being unable to read of farming outside Malta the illiterate believes that no methods could be better than those tried, tested and taught by his father and grand-father before him. Hence a major part of the work of an advisory service is "to create conditions which will give the farmer confidence in the advice given. The adviser must be above creed or party and honest in all his dealings. In addition, however, some inducement must be offered to the farmer to accept advice and the most powerful inducement that has yet been found is money - cash - a better price"[39].

654 232 One example of this inducement in practice was afforded by the study of pig feeding using balanced rations which was undertaken by the Agricultural Advisory Service early in its career. Haesler was able to show that "the high mortality rate in small pigs can be considerably reduced, and what is more important, losses in pig keeping have been turned into profits" (B/252, p.3). The farming public was assailed with Maltese-language leaflets[40] showing how the traditional pig feeding patterns were both wrongly balanced and generally excessive in quantity and encouraging pig breeders to invest in the prepared balanced rations ('Ghalf Bilanċjat') then on the market. This improved diet would, it was claimed, not only produce a better pig but would result in reduced costs of feeding. This prospect appealed to the farmer, who hastened to purchase the balanced ration particularly as such rations were subsidized by the Government[40] in order to encourage

159 423 551 [554] [621] The family has occupied the present house for several generations and has acquired the street name as a family nick-name (these nick-names remain the standard, even semi-official, mode of reference though not of address, when the Christian name is used, v.B/376). Gaetu is a prominent member of the community in his part of the village which now includes some non-agricultural workers.

159 829 461 234 His outlook is rather more 'urban' than that of more isolated farmers, such as Case II. His adult son is an active supporter of the local football club and a regular cinema-goer. Gaetu himself is not concerned with such relaxation. He is devoted to his animals and especially to the goats which he will keep "because we have always had them". He takes an interest in farming and, despite his illiteracy, is fully prepared to listen to advice. He enters animals in shows at Ghammieri and attended public lectures organized for farmers in 1957 (Section 4). He thought the lectures and a film on dairying technique interesting but gave the usual verdict that Maltese farming suffers from special difficulties of its own which cannot be solved by what he believes are "foreign methods". He observes that "it would be an excellent idea to go to the trouble of washing ones animals regularly but the time and labour thus expended would bring no additional return to the farmer". He believes that the methods which he employs throughout the working of his farm are tried and therefore to be trusted although in more than a few cases some basic cost accounting (as suggested at the lectures) would reveal the patent weaknesses in his argument.

CASE VI : Summary.

159 423 (A goats' and cows' milk producer with a considerable land holding.)

A. Land.

23 tmien of land, mainly dry, comprising 11 plots in 7 parcels arranged in two main blocks, one in the Ghajn Qajjet (Rabat-Dingli Uplands) one in the Blue Clay Basin on slopes of Wied Qlejgha. The former on soils of the l-Iklin Complex, the latter on good, sheltered Carbonate Raw Soils.

[429] All rented from a number of landlords, including the Civil government. Rent estimated at c.£30 p.a.

159 241 B. Utilisation.

The emphasis is on fodder crops.

Crop plan, Feb. 1957.

Plot 1	Potatoes	Plot 7	Sulla
Plot 2	Sulla	Plot 8	Tomatoes, potatoes.
Plot 3	Barley	Plot 9	Tomatoes
Plot 4	Barley	Plot 10	Vines
Plot 5	Vetches	Plot 11	Sulla
Plot 6	Poor grass for bedding and grazing.	Plus walkside fruits and vines in several plots.	